

Teachers Lived Experiences In The New Normal In Philippine Public Schools: A Phenomenology

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Abstract

Teachers are important figures in schools. They have also their narratives during this COVID – 19 pandemic. Education in the new normal needs a lot of adjustments since teachers were not well-equipped when the pandemic came. The purpose of the study is to ascertain the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the new normal in Philippine public education from the lived experiences of public school teachers. The study utilized the qualitative phenomenological research design. Based on the findings, eight themes emerged from the lived experiences of teachers which are: (1)technologically literate 21st-century teachers; (2) Collaboration, Commitment, and Competence (3Cs) are critical skill and values; (3) the need for the new normal pedagogies; (4) difficult to monitor, feedback, and assess learning; (5) online and offline platforms, applications, software as support; (6) acquired skills in writing modules and Self-Learning Kits; (7) reaching out to students and parents a challenge; and (8) Covid 19 a threat in the workplace. It is concluded that teachers showed resilience despite the weaknesses and threats and translated those into strengths and opportunities.

Keywords: teachers, lived experiences, new normal, Philippines, public schools

INTRODUCTION

The world has suddenly changed due to the COVID 19 pandemic. No one was prepared when this pandemic struck the world. For more than a year now, it continuously affects and shapes the lives of almost all people around the world, regardless of socio-economic, educational, and political status. The future is still uncertain if the virus still spreads and continuously infects people all over the world.

The Philippines is one of the most affected countries around the world by the virus. The latest data show that the Philippines as of the writing is in the top 19th among the countries with the most infected with the virus. The number of infected with the virus continues to rise despite all the lockdowns and strict health protocols implemented by the government. Hence, Filipinos are expected to live under the “new normal” for a longer period. The most affected in this new situation are businesses, transportation, public services, health, and education.

These important sectors in this country serve as the backbone for the improved quality of life among Filipinos. One of the most affected is the state of education in the country. The education sector, through the Commission on Higher Education, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, and the Department of Education have to find ways to continuously deliver quality and equitable education for all students across all levels of learning.

In basic education, the Department of Education offers different learning delivery modalities that the region, division, or school may adopt depending on the geographical location, socio-economic status, and quality of students. Those learning modalities aim to cater to the needs of learners from various walks of life.

Most public schools all over the country adopt the Modular Distance Learning Delivery as a mode of learning for its students. With this modality, students were given self-learning kits and self-learning modules for them to answer weekly with the help of their guardians and parents at home. Teachers also assure that there is open communication with the parents and students to continuously monitor and address their needs. However, it cannot be denied that teaching in the new normal has weaknesses and threats. To cite one concrete example, the health of frontline teachers is at risk for they have to physically distribute and retrieve modules from the parents or guardians. On the other hand, the new normal in education offers strengths and opportunities. For instance, teachers learn new skills with help of technology. They learn to use Google Classroom and Quipper as learning platforms. Meanwhile, more strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats can be cited based on the firsthand experiences of the teachers.

This study aimed to determine the lived experiences of the Philippine public school teachers in the new normal education.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to ascertain the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the new normal in Philippine public education from the lived experiences of public school teachers.

RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODS

This study utilized qualitative phenomenological research design. The phenomenological design describes the interpretations of the participants from their experiences. The participants were required to respond to the questions provide to them via google forms. After, they were requested to participate in a Focus Group Discussion virtually and face to face, depending on the situation. At the end of this study, themes and common patterns were extracted from their responses (Jamon&Cabanes, 2019). They decided to use a qualitative phenomenological research design because they would dwell on the individual experiences of the teachers under the new normal in Philippine public education.

There were 38 participants of the study who had firsthand experiences in the new normal in Philippine public education. The data gathered were recorded, transcribed, and validated to extract the first-hand experiences on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the new normal in Philippine public education from the secondary teachers' lived experiences. They used the Colaizzi method data analysis in a phenomenological research design.

This is purely academic. The participants signed the informed consent and there is no risk in this study. They can anytime withdraw as participant of the study. Ethical considerations and safety health protocol were followed.

RESULTSAND DISCUSSIONS

The teachers shared their experiences and narratives in the implementation of teaching and learning in the new normal. The themes that emerged after the focus group discussion have strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). These are the following:

Theme 1: Technologically literate 21st-century teachers

The first strength of the teachers in the new normal in Philippine public education is that they are a technologically literate 21st-century teacher which is evident from their responses.

"I apply ICT in teaching my new normal students." (P1)

"I have the knowledge of using computers and printers. I am also proficient in using media." (P2)

"I do well in learning innovative conferencing using virtual meeting." (P3)

"I can communicate with students and parents through social media." (P5)

"I can use virtual means of communication well." (P6)

"I can think better and effective ways to use technologies as one of my platforms for communicating my future students." (P8)

"I know how to explore the different use of social media communications and social applications to communicate with the students." (P14)

"I have a capability to use Microsoft office. I can also use social media communications." (P16)

"I do well in accessing the media platforms." (P25)

As defined by Raulston and Alexiou-Ray (2018), technological literacy is someone's capacity to determine the accuracy of information from the web and the correct use of all types of technology. They further noted that technology-literate teachers are those who were taught, modeled, and used technology in teaching practice. This is true as far as the public teachers are concerned because one of the important Key Result Areas (KRAs) is their effective use of ICT and its application to the teaching and learning process.

The data imply that public school teachers in the 21st century are technologically literate. Nawaz and Kundi (2010) mentioned that the "new educated" are those who are computer or digitally literate. They further opined that both teachers and students have no choice but to acquire skills in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to survive the "digital growing societies".

Moreover, teachers nowadays are expected to be ICT and technologically literate. In fact, during the teachers' hiring in the Department of Education, teachers must undergo "skills demonstration" and the most common skill demonstrated by the teacher applicants is computer literacy. The demand for ICT or technologically literate teachers emanates from the dominance of ICT and technology in their lives (Oliver, 2002 as cited in Nawaz & Kundi, 2010). Teachers are important when it comes to the effective use of technology in education. They are urged to continuously improve their computer literacy and use this skill in teaching and learning (Asan, 2003).

The world nowadays depends on technology (Frank & Barzilai, 2006). Teachers who do not know how to use technology cannot be fully effective and efficient. Teachers in the 21st-century are empowered to use technology and must be technologically literate to survive in the present education era. They will no longer survive the present education era if they do not know how to use technology (Boholano, Balo, Pogoy, & Alda, 2020).

During this pandemic situation, one of the most important skills that teachers must have is the skill of using technology. Without this skill, it is unimaginable if they can be able to survive in these unprecedented situations. Teachers who use technology in teaching improve their students' achievement making them motivated and critical thinkers (Saglam & Sert, 2012; Chang, 2012).

Ertmer and Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2006) found out that the emphasis on technology training during in-service seminars improve the technological literacy of teachers. Meanwhile, they suggested that the integration of technology in education and educational technology must be introduced during pre-service education because they will be better prepared for the future of teaching and learning.

Studies revealed that technologically literate teachers have important roles to play for the effective and efficient use of technology in schools (Seufert, Guggemos, & Sailer, 2020). 42 studies with 7000 student participants revealed that the use of technology in teaching and learning could increase students' achievement, as well as, their cognitive and affective domains. Moreover, technological literacy also influences how teachers perceive paper

works and lesson planning (Saglam&Sert, 2012). Significantly, ICT becomes essential in teaching in learning (Fiedman, 2006 as cited in Sanchez, Marcos, Gonzalez, &GuanLin, 2012). Henceforth, it is important to provide teachers formal ICT training and experience to enhance their knowledge, skills, and attitude towards ICT (Mahmud & Ismail, 2010).

Theme 2: Collaboration, Commitment, and Competence (3Cs) are critical skill and values

The second strength of the teachers in the new normal in Philippine public education is their capacity to collaborate, being committed, and being competent which are essential skills. These are evident from their responses.

"I am good at acting, helping, and cooperating with my colleagues." (P17)

"As mandated in the institution where I belong, I should do the things needed for the welfare of the students- act, help, and cooperate."(P15)

"I know how to cooperate with other teachers."(P18)

"I do well in focusing on my task since I only have limited time (WFH problems)." (P2)

"I was able to manage my time wisely in doing my responsibilities as a teacher. I was also able to be more understanding when it comes to the needs of my students." (P9)

I do well in adjusting my attitudes to whatever situations presented in this new normal."(P26)

"I do well in improving my lesson in a form of writing especially when it comes to the congruency of my content and competencies."(P23)

This implies that 21st century skills were developed during this pandemic. Grangeat and Gray (2007) define teachers' competencies as acquired skills and knowledge that enable them to perform their tasks effectively and efficiently.

Collaboration is one of the most important skills in the 21st century. And with the advent of technology, collaborating with other teachers, stakeholders, students, and school administrator is easier (Morel, 2014). On one hand, as defined by Tyree (1999) as cited in Moses, Berry, Saab, and Admiraal (2017), "commitment refers to a high level of attachment to something in a social endeavor." Grangeat and Gray (2007) on the other hand define teachers' competencies as acquired skills and knowledge that enable them to perform their tasks effectively and efficiently.

The data tell that the aforementioned skill and values are critical to be able to keep on going in the new normal. This new normal in education offers the most unprecedented times in all teachers' lives. The values that teachers hold are significant as they perform their duties and responsibilities. It is elating that find out that teachers have those skill values, which is contrary to what others perceive the public school teachers.

To further elaborate, collaborating with others improve teachers' job satisfaction. By collaborating, teachers also become a good role model to students and the community (Morel, 2014). Teachers' collaboration is one of the most important indicators of a school's success (Tzivinikou, 2015). Previous researches revealed that teachers' teaching and learning are improved through their collective efforts (Plauborg, 2009).

Talking about teachers' commitment, the type of school leadership in school has a great influence on teachers' commitment (Geijsel, Slegers, Leithwood, &Jantzi, 2003). However, in the study of Karakus and Aslan (2009) teachers' commitment vary depending on teachers' gender, marital status, and tenure. In their study, female teachers are more committed to the teaching profession than male teaches. However, married teachers are less committed to the teaching profession than unmarried ones. Moreover, as the tenure and position increases, the commitment towards the profession also increases. Teachers' commitment, as well, is influenced by their workplace and colleagues.

Theme 3: The need for the new normal pedagogies

According to the teachers they need training on the new normal pedagogies. This is presumed from their responses.

"I did not understand well on changing of the style of modules making. From which it will be supposed to be a bookmaking but turns to printed modules. And then time turns again to SLK." (P1)

"I do not do well in some aspects of teaching that is not familiar to me in the new normal." (P4)

"I was not able to teach/discuss the topics because of this new normal education which students will just be given modules." (P9)

"I am not prepared to teach in the new normal because I was used to the face-to-face teaching." (P27)

"I had no idea on how to teach students nowadays because there still no seminar about teaching in the new normal." (P 28)

The public school teachers admitted that they are strangers in terms of the current situation of the Philippine educational system. They are "pedagogical and content knowledge experts" in face-to-face classes, but Covid 19 outbreak in the Philippines compelled all the educational institutions to change the mode of learning from face to face to online (Hew, Jia, Gonda, & Bai, 2020), modular, and blended learning. Admittedly, even the college faculty who had more exposure to online and remote teaching were having difficulty teaching in the new normal because no one prepared them in these unprecedented times (Hew, Jia, Gonda, & Bai, 2020). Toquero and Talidong (2020) stressed that teachers are not fully prepared to teach in the new normal.

The rapid change from face-to-face teaching to new learning modalities is a huge challenge for policymakers, educators, and teachers. The new pedagogical trends caused anxiety and fear on how to teach students in the new normal (Yorgancioglu, 2020). The responses of the teacher participants imply that teachers must be upskilled and retooled with the new normal teaching pedagogies, be it online or remote teaching to better capacitate them.

In the study of Yorgancioglu (2020), he opined that the present situation needs new ways, tools, methods, and experiences of teaching and learning. He, however, suggests that the new pedagogies shall be "technology-driven". Peters et al. (2020) call this "digital pedagogies".

The present situation compels all educators and policymakers to explore new digital, online, and pedagogical possibilities to continuously deliver quality education among their learners (Peters et al., 2020). The new normal forced teachers to prepare and capacitate themselves to continuously deliver quality education (Motala & Menon, 2020).

Theme 4: Difficult to monitor, feedback, and assess learning

There is also another concern to be considered in the implementation of teaching and learning in the new normal in Philippine public education according to the teacher participants. These include the difficulty to monitor, feedback, and assess learning. This is apparent from their responses.

"I hardly evaluate the performance of my students when it comes to the punctuality of the students to submit their modules." (P 5)

"I cannot monitor my child's printed modules and follow up with their online learning. Frankly speaking, I cannot monitor my students' learning anymore." (P 6)

"I do not well in checking the answer sheets of my students." (P 7)

"I was not able to monitor/ communicate some of my students because some of them are still having and hard time adapting to the new normal changes in education." (P 9)

"I find a hard time in checking students' modules. I have quite a hesitation at first in checking students' modules because of this COVID thing." (P14)

For the public school teachers, one of the weaknesses of the new normal in Philippine education is the difficulty to monitor, feedback, and assess learning. These difficulties are tried to address by the Department of Education by continuously issuing orders and memoranda to guide teachers. Just recently, the Department of Education issued DepEd Order No. 31 s. 2020 as a guide in assessing and grading learners in light of Covid 19 pandemic. Though the order provides clear and specific guidelines on how to assess and grade learners, teachers are

still experiencing problems with monitoring, feedbacking, and assessing student learning due to several gaps, such as communication, technology, and students' socioeconomic status.

Tracking students' progress through the collection of their works, assessment, and grading are the best ways to measure if they are continuing to learn despite the new educational setup in the country. Similarly, in the United States of America, 58 percent of school districts expect that their teachers monitor students' progress or provide feedback among students (Gross & Opalka, 2020). Moreover, some of the narratives of the teachers are:

"I find it hard to assess my learners' intellectual and personal aspect." (P23)

"I find it hard to checking students' outputs." (P 27)

"It is difficult to manage my time because I still have to print and distribute modules, check outputs, do paper works, and monitor students." (P 28)

"It's hard to assess/evaluate the exact learning of the students whether they learned or not." (P29)

This implies that teachers are concern with students' learning. Cahapay (2020) suggested that when grading learners in the new normal, schools should change the ways they use assessment scales from "quantitative to qualitative such as pass or fail system". Teachers and students in the new normal in education are burdened just to achieve all curriculum requirements (Aliyyah et al., 2020). Students in the Department of Education are given at least seven modules or SLKs per week in at least eight weeks per quarter. In total, students have to answer at least 240 modules or SLKs for the entire school year. Each module or SLK has at least four activities. These, for the students, from the researchers' point of view are challenging, considering their limited resources to search from the web, their parents' capacity to guide them, and their socioeconomic status. On the other hand, teachers, as well, face obstacles such as they have to balance their time for printing and sorting of the modules, marking the modules, making the modules and weekly home learning plan, complying with all the documents required from them to submit, and accomplishing the attachments for their Result-Based Performance Management System (RPMS).

These dilemmas in the education spectrum is not just experienced in the Philippines. Niemi and Kousa (2020) revealed that even in Finland where the best quality of education is provided, teachers also experience problems with students' assignments and examinations. Even if the students were able to accomplish their tasks, teachers remain skeptic, whether the students really learned or they just copied their answers from others.

Theme 5: Online and offline platforms, applications, software as support

According to the teachers, there are also opportunities in the new normal such as the online and offline platforms, applications, and software as support. This is supposed from their responses.

"I learned how to use Zoom and Google Meet as medium of communication." (P1)

"I was able to use apps like Zoom, Google Meet, etc." (P3)

"I acquired the knowledge in using QR codes." (P 4)

"I learned using software applications to maximize my time at work. I learned how to use Google Classroom and other virtual means of communications like Jitsk, Google Meet, and Zoom." (P6)

"I learned to use different media platforms like Google Meet and Zoom." (P8)

Teachers' responses revealed that the new normal in Philippine education is aided by the offline and online platforms, applications, and software. These technologies serve as the backbone of the teachers, considering the present situation where face-to-face interaction is limited and communication influx became needed. The new normal in education paved the way for the introduction of different online and offline platforms such as "Google, TV broadcasts, resources, video lectures, and online channels" (UNESCO, 2020 as cited in Tria, 2020). Moreover, several learning modalities were introduced by DepEd and CHED such as blended learning, distance learning, home-schooling, and more modalities that would fit the needs and capacity of learners (Tria, 2020). Another narrative of the teachers like:

"I learned to explore new platforms in sound made to deliver to my students the assistance they needed." (P10)

"I improve my technology skills, especially in the computer a little but it could help." (P15)

"I learned to explore technology using Zoom, Google Meet." (P19)

"I learn how to use some of the functions of the computer that I have never learned before." (P21)

"I was able to discover that Google Forms can be used as answer sheet." (P28)

The data imply that teachers learned these online and offline platforms, applications, and software even with the absence of formal training. Just like the research participants, the current state of Philippine education in a pandemic situation made teachers more innovative and creative. They also started using Google Classroom, WebQuest, Zoom, Kotobee, FB Messenger (Toquero, 2020), and other online sites to hold classes and participate in meetings, seminars, conferences.

Similarly, educational institutions, particularly private ones are empowering teachers to use digital technology (Toquero&Talidong, 2020). These online and offline platforms provide inexpensive opportunities for teachers to teach and communicate (Gregory et al., 2015) and for the learners to learn compared to the self-learning modules and other printed learning modalities.

Learning the different online and offline platforms provide teachers unique and rewarding teaching experiences that are not present in traditional face-to-face teaching (Fish & Gill, 2009).

Despite the continuous improvement of the internet connectivity in the country for the past ten years (Perreras, n.d.), the main challenge when using an online virtual platform is still the speed of internet connection. Based on the study of Salac and Kim (2016), the Philippines still lags behind in terms of internet connectivity among other developing countries in Asia. Meanwhile, the worldwide rank of the Philippines falls at 104 among 160 countries (Salac& Kim, 2016).

Theme 6: Acquired skills in writing modules and Self-Learning Kits

Another opportunity for the teachers in the new normal in Philippine public education is that they acquired skills in writing modules and self-learning kits. This is evident from their responses.

"I was able to write a Self-Learning Kit in a short period." (P2)

"I was given a chance to become a writer in SLK and SLM." (P5)

"I was able to enhance my skills in writing an effective self-learning kit." (P 9)

"I learned how to create a Self-Learning Kit (SLK) for the students." (14)

"I learned how to Quality Assure the modules and knew how to write Self-Learning Kit." (P20)

One of the most significant strengths of the new normal in Philippine education is that teachers acquired skills in writing modules and SLKs. Before the pandemic, only the master teachers and education program supervisors were the only ones required to prepare instructional materials. When the pandemic came, the Department of Education sought the help of proficient teachers (Teachers I-III) to prepare modules and SLKs for the modular distance learning. One of the main purposes for adopting modular-distance learning is to cater to learners who are in low and middle income and those who have limited or no access to digital learning resources (Habler, Khalayleh, &McBurnie, 2020).

For the researchers, acquiring skills in writing modules and SKLs can help teachers professionally because other than learning a new skill, it could also help them for their promotion. Being a module and SLK writer is also an additional point for the Result-Based Performance Management System (RPMS) for the plus factor.

The theme implies that before the pandemic, teachers, particularly the proficient teachers had no skills in writing modules and SLKs. Hence, this limits the capacity of teachers to innovate because they had no formal training in writing modules and SLKs. The authors suggest that even the post-pandemic, the proficient teachers may still be continuously trained and empowered to write modules and SLKs.

Theme 7: Reaching out to students and parents a challenge

There are also threat of the teachers in the new normal in Philippine public education is the challenge of reaching out to students and parents. This is assumed from their responses.

"I find it hard to reach out to some of my students in terms of monitoring as to why their parents or guardians weren't able to get/return their modules. Some of them don't have a contact number." (P2)

"I find it hard to look for ways and means to reach some of my students." (P6)

"The obstacles that I face under this new normal education was that adapting the changes in facilitating learning to the students." (P 9)

"I find it difficult to communicate with other students who cannot have any gadgets and Facebook accounts. I have also difficulties in relaying information and instructions on how to go through answering their modules, students can barely understand the given printed guidelines on how to answer their module." (P14)

"I find it hard to contact/follow up students who have problems in their studies using online platforms. I also find it hard to explain or discuss to students their difficulties in answering their modules." (P24)

The perceived threat of the teacher in the new normal is the challenge of reaching out to students and parents. For them, it is difficult to communicate with parents and students in the present situation. This implies that more students are at risk of dropping out of school or failing because teachers have difficulty communicating and giving feedback to them. Students who are not monitored and given intervention in the new normal have a greater chance of dropping out of school, and if not given proper attention may lose chances to come back to school (Fontanos, Gonzales, Lucasan, & Ocampo, 2020). The out-of-school children have a higher risk of "teenage pregnancy, sexual exploitation, child marriage, violence, and other threats."

Blankstein, Frederick, and Wolff-Eisenberg (2020) suggested that teachers must continuously communicate with the students despite the technological divide among them. However, teachers through the help of the school administrators and DepEd policymakers must be given assistance and interventions to help teachers reach out to students and teachers. Further, the teachers must collaborate with parents, communities, and other stakeholders to continuously reach the students (Fontanos, Gonzales, Lucasan, & Ocampo, 2020).

Theme 8: Covid 19 a threat in the workplace

The public school teachers found out the threat of Covid 19 in the workplace. This is evident from their responses.

"I am afraid of meeting my new bulky sets of students considering our unsolved health stature." (P1)

"The threat of Covid 19 is still everywhere, especially in public places like Schools." (P17)

"While traveling and at work, I find it risky for my health condition because of the threat of COVID-19." (P21)

"I fear of being infected with COVID-19 during module distribution and retrieval." (P24)

It is a common fear nowadays that teachers and other workers have is being infected with the Covid 19 virus. The spread of Covid 19 caused fear among individuals. In communities, people become suspicious towards others in terms of the disease spread. Others are even afraid of becoming sick or die due to the virus (Khan, Mamun, Griffiths, & Ulah, 2020).

The frontline workers, including the teachers, have now experienced anxiety, depression, and insomnia due to the continuous fear of having the virus (Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2020). Similarly, the public school teachers' fear at work is Covid 19. The common predictors of fear of Covid 19 virus are health anxiety, regular media use, social media use, and risks for loved ones (Mertens, Gerritsen, Duijndam, & Engelhard, 2020). Serafini et al. (2020) suggested that it is important to implement strategies to support those who are psychologically vulnerable teachers during the Covid 19 pandemic.

CONCLUSION

The basic education teachers' resilient attitude towards teaching and learning in the new normal was evident despite all the challenges they encounter. The Covid-19 pandemic brought strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to teacher educators in the new normal. The teachers translated the weaknesses into opportunities in the delivery of the lessons during pandemic.

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